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ABSTRACT

Individualized learning is one of the current educational trends. This approach is an answer to the differences found among students in terms of their abilities and disabilities, learning styles, objectives, and interests. Individualized instruction calls for a synthesis of strategies, which should be categorized in a hierarchy projecting all previously acquired skills of second language learning toward the continuum of fluency. A learning taxonomy may be formulated within such strategies as contracts, centered activity packages, learner activity packages, mini-courses, and independent study. Before individualization can take place, re-education of students, faculty, administrators, parents and the community is necessary. Teachers wishing to individualize learning in their schools should be careful to get the support and cooperation of other teachers throughout the school, so that consistency will be achieved and confusion minimized. (AM)

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Individualizing Second-Language Learning

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This article constitutes part of the proceedings of the Modern Language Council Annual Conference held in Banff, Alberta, on October 22-23, 1976.

Individualized learning is a process which initiates an observable change in performance on the part of an individual (Politzer and Logan). The process involved has a geminated quality: it has two aspects. First, it accounts for the necessary behavioral objectives for second-language learning; and, secondly, it accounts for the necessity of being a continuum. The latter may be defined as communicative properties which, if eliminated, would project learning towards a point of termination.

Individualizing learning and personalizing instruction are the present trends of education, influenced by numerous factors concerned with the societal and psychological perspectives of life. One factor may be discerned through an assessment of a random sample of pupils. Recent studies have indicated the following differences amongst second-language learners:

1. students have different abilities;
2. they have different modes of learning;
3. they have different disabilities;
4. they have different objectives;

ED092177

5. they have different interest in content;
6. they need and want different emphasis on oral and written skills, reading, conversation (Logan).

The above basic learner differences clearly portray the fallacies of the Lock Step Method in which the successive units are introduced homogeneously, but, in reality, the learner acquisition of what the units have to offer are at heterogeneous levels. This is also a factor which causes alarm for the unreality of the rationale for second-language learning. The levels of learning do not relate to real life, that is to say, not the real life of the student (Harry Reinert).

Additional pressure towards individualization rises with the view that society has become pluralistic and that the products of schools or learner of this society will require pluralistic motivation. Society places stress not only on efficiency but also on individual and human growth. The focus is now placed upon a philosophy (individualization) that possesses pluralistic attributes with the purpose of humanizing education.

The 'pendulum of life' is moving away from what was once considered to be incentives to learn. The elimination of a second language for college entrance requirements diminished the impetus towards second-language learning. The latter thus created a need for additional attractions. Students no longer are grade conscious and peer competitors, but rather they have become sifters of methods, cherishing only the glistening or intriguing pebbles (multi-media activities) and ignoring the flat(textbook).

This characteristic has aroused administrative concerns over the problems of low enrollments in classrooms at higher levels. The problems have been attacked by combining classes of advanced levels. A better solution would be to allow for stratification within a classroom through individualization.

Functionalism is another aspect which influences individualization of learning. In order that education and the school remain functional, students need to be educated for a world of the future; "As a result each student needs to participate in determining who he is, what he is doing and where he is heading" (Strasheim).

The factors mentioned call for a synthesis of strategies. Allowance for individual learning characteristics emphasizes the need for varied strategies accommodating different individual learning styles. The strategies utilized should be categorized in a hierarchy projecting all previously acquired skills of second-language learning towards the continuum of fluency.

Second-language teachers need to remember that strategies and methods are interdependent. Although a strategy is not a method, it helps to manipulate introduced and learned material for the purpose of reinforcement.

One needs to remember also the time element involved in language learning. Within different learner abilities some may be slower than others. Benjamin Bloom poses the theory that slow learners can learn as much as fast learners, but that they require more time and different instructional strategies (Kenneth and Rita Dunn).

Learners can absorb any information to which they are exposed providing that they are brought into contact with the stimulus frequently, in a variety of ways and with intensity(Kenneth and Rita Dunn). With the time element in mind, an instructor may thus create patterns of strategies for individual learning.

"The shape and dimensions of an individual program are defined by the imaginations of the teacher and student in that program and are reflections of the needs, goals and resources at hand"(Altman). There is, however, a need to realize the manner in which goals may be achieved. Goals and objectives are initially the projected expectations of second-language learning.

An introduction of complex material before simple material may create a defeatist attitude on the part of the learner. Patterns of strategies for individualization should thus observe a taxonomy. A language learning taxonomy may be formulated within strategies, such as contracts, centered activity packages, learner activity packages, mini-courses and independent learning.

A 'contract' is basically a student's choice of various strategies designed to reinforce the same desired behavior. The contract informs the student about a set of objectives and provides a variety of activities involving either the psychomotor or the cognitive domain.

The psychomotor domain contains the behaviors which require physical activity, such as sound discrimination, sound productions, gestures(Valette). The cognitive domain, on the other hand, entails behaviors which require knowledge, understanding and intellectual activity(Valette).

Concentration will now be given for different listening strategies as patterns of individualization within a contract. Learners of Ukrainian as a second language sometimes have difficulty in pronouncing certain sounds in different positions, because they

do not hear the differences, even though they are well aware of them.

A method for the allowance of audio-discrimination of consonantal and vocalic sounds may be 'selective listening' or the selection of sounds which correspond to the lead given by the stimulus(appendix I). The strategies used to reinforce the listening skill may be in the form of the following:

(1) laboratory practice (multiple-choice);
(2) language masters (if writing has been introduced);
(3) overheads showing graphic tongue positions for the difficult sounds - visuals;
(4) liberation sheets (tongue-twisters);
(5) peer teaching;
(6) mirror and model practice.

One may notice that the second and the third strategies involve both the psychomotor and the cognitive domains as defined by Valette. The fifth strategy, or peer teaching, involves both domains with the inclusion of the affective domain. Valette defines the affective domain as an interaction of attitudes and feelings.

The described contract does not rest entirely on individualization. Total individualization using the contract system transforms the learner into an 'island'; thus the student will drift away from the whole(society).

Learner non-committal behavior is not desirable for language competency. Aldridge claims that contracts may be designed to motivate second-language learning, but conversation cannot be taught by contract. Much of conversation learning for language competency lies within the affective domain.

Total individualization is not desirable, because the affective domain involves tolerance which is learned through interaction within the school(peers) and in the community(native speakers). The initial stage of the affective domain is receptivity, which is a positive learning attitude stimulated and directed by the teacher (Valette). During this stage, a pupil learns to cooperate and learns not to resist learning.

Unless receptivity has been enticed, all attempts on the part of the teacher to draw the learner towards skills lying within the cognitive and psychomotor domains will remain futile. Individualized learning within the affective domain will probably become effective after the second stage defined by Valette as responsive-

ness, and continue on to appreciation, internalization and characterization (Valette).

Total immersion into individualized learning from the Lock Step Method is a chaotic and treacherous venture. Individualization can become rewarding if it takes place gradually with initially the re-educating of the learner and the shifting of roles of the teacher as presenter to programmer and counsellor. A learner needs to be trained to accept responsibilities, to strive for mastery, and to work independently.

The involvement in the individualized program reverses from the teacher to the student. The teacher, within the individualized program, becomes the evaluator and observer. The student, on the other hand, becomes the participant and the demandant.

Before individualization may take place, the administration must be willing to allow for extreme changes. Individualization involves much pre-planning, designing, evaluating and directing. These characteristics remove the teacher from the role as a technician and disciplinarian.

The administration will thus be required to express its confidence in the teacher through support and provision of markers, technicians or teacher-aides, so as to allow the teacher to adhere to a more professional role as an assessor and a counsellor. Teachers will also be required to spend time aside from class time for preparation and, if need be, the administration should be prepared to allow for extra preparation time. Other changes that will occur will be in the area of supply, for example, the supply of paper, equipment, class space and laboratory facilities.

Students will need prior evaluation concerning learner differences, interests and needs. This may become expensive and time-consuming. The expense may increase the tax dollar if individualization occurs immediately.

Re-education does not only reflect the school and its pupils but also the parents and the community. The community will have the responsibility of volunteering resources for activities, whether it be in the form of native speakers or research information.

Parents will be required to update their knowledge of the educational trends, in an attempt to assist the teacher in his efforts to guide the learner through the stages of the affective domain. Parental understanding and acceptance are the major stepping stones directed towards acquisition of learner tolerance necessary for second-language learning.

Altman places emphases on 'Three R's for individualization' as the necessary procedures for the implementation of individualized learning. The first one is re-education, in the sense already mentioned, with the additional comment that "our re-education must concern itself with the concept of freedom"(Altman). In an individualized classroom, the teacher does not have a responsibility to teach, but to facilitate learning.

The learning depends upon properly diagnosed interests, capabilities and needs. The student must learn to accept this freedom of demanding what he wishes to learn, of analyzing his interests and of accepting the responsibility of progressive learning.

Relevance, according to Altman, means that "teachers must allow their students freedom to learn, guiding their lives but not running them." The results of the procedures for the implementation of individualization of second-language learning would be described in the following way:

> "The learner bears significant responsibility for the success of his learning. If he is given instruction of sufficient quality and clarity, if help is available to him when needed, if he is allowed an adequate amount of time to accomplish his tasks and if he is willing to persevere in his learning, then he will bear his responsibility proudly." (Altman)

The acceptance of responsibility sets the foundation for individualizing learning.

Having described and analyzed the processes of individualization of second-language learning, concentration will be given towards a realistic portrayal of some classroom implications. Where does one begin individualizing? Whether teachers have realized it or not, individualization has already taken place during the process of rewriting and adapting textbook material to fit their style of presentation and the pace of the students. Groupings are also a tendency towards individualization.

If individualizing has not taken place, and one wishes to begin implementation, one could begin gradually, first with a basic philosophy. The philosophy should be the same throughout the school, because the students are virtually the same from Grade I to Grade XII.

Teachers should plan their work together (Renee Taillefer). A successful implementation would be possible through full support of the administration.

"Individualization in second-language learning is not a program, it is an attitude and an approach to learning"(Logan). The attitude towards individualization should be consistent within the school and the community. Misconstrued information about individualization is detrimental to the success of the efforts on the part of the teacher and the learner.

If individualization has not occurred in other subjects taught within the school, the reactions to this novel approach in education might be characteristic of the following:

(1) the teacher is shrinking from his responsibilities by making the learner do all the work;
(2) the classroom is mixed up: the students are lost in their own worlds;
(3) individualization costs more than it contributes to the learner;
(4) the material is not available for individualizing second-language learning.

An inconsistent attitude employs toxic vibrations. The vibrations may arouse learner resistance towards individualization.

Speaking from the point of view of a teacher, one may ask "what is to be done?" Bearing in mind Logan's description of individualization, one can begin with preparations. Educators are learning that the reverse pattern of the following present classroom situation is reality:

> ...."the active person(talking, demonstrating, moving, directing) is the teacher. The pupil (who should be actively involved and participating if he is to learn the things to which he has been exposed) is passive" (Kenneth and Rita Dunn).

Depending upon the learner's perceptual strengths (and weaknesses), some children learn by listening(auditory learners); some learn by seeing (visual learners) and still others through whole-body involvement(kinesthetic learners). Knowing that educators are realizing the need for the reversal mentioned, one may begin by informing and educating the public(community).

This is a vital step, because, if an uninformed parent chose to visit a classroom operating with the individualized approach, he may experience the following:

> "...schools may appear chaotic. Things seem disorganized; all sorts of people are talking to one another simultaneously; some kids are obviously wasting

time; the teacher does not seem to be aware of, or to be concerned about the various patterns of activity in the room" (Altman).

Instead of the above classroom appearance the audience should be trained to note the following:

(1) who is doing the talking;
(2) structure of the classroom;
(3) expressions on the learner's face: interest, concentration or boredom;
(4) the nature of the competition.

The training may be done through parent visitations, displays and parent-teacher workshops.

Using the material from the Lock Step Method, one should then gear himself towards the making of provisions in the curriculum for individual differences in learning. Individualized learning requires personalized instruction.

The child in a classroom will need to be looked upon as the child who enjoys learning at the laboratory or one who enjoys learning while utilizing visuals: a child with a separate learning personality. This requires personal interest on behalf of the teacher. Having diagnosed the learners personalities, the teacher may then begin to create patterns for individualized learning.

Patterns may be introduced gradually, through strategies mentioned, as group activities striving towards individualization. Initially, introduction of patterns may be done with larger groups with the intent of allowing time for individuals to learn to accept individualism.

When an individual is revealing signs of personal interest in various areas, a regrouping can take place. Learners may also be grouped according to learner difficulties bearing in mind the strategies that may function best in view of the difficulties faced (Renée Taillefer).

After having acquired the insight into what can be done for the learner, emphasis should be projected towards the whole - entailing the learners and the teacher. The teacher's attitude should be constructive. The definition of individualization implies four changes in the traditional attitudes (lock step attitudes). The changes, as described by Harry Reinert, are the following:

(1) abandon the expectation that each student will develop equally;
(2) commend each student for developing each skill to the best of his ability;
(3) re-study the use of audio equipment in the light of the special demands of individualizing instruction;
(4) develop innovative programs around audio-equipment and other new tools and equipment.

The present trend of education suggests that individualizing second-language learning is for the improvement, humanization and personalization of education. Improvement requires the formulation of a goal.

Personalization means allowing the students to choose topics designed for interest and development of skills worked out by the teacher and then offered to the learners who may select different combinations. In summary, individualizing of second-language learning means involvement, contribution, enjoyment and satisfaction leading to success or second-language competency.

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APPENDIX I.

Teaching Strategies

Level I - Phonology

Performance objectives:

1. Listening -

   -to hear all meaningful sound contrasts of the second language when it is spoken at a normal speed in complete utterances.

2. Speaking -

-to produce all the significant sounds and intonation patterns of the second language in a manner acceptable t. native speakers.

SKILL: listening
STIMULUS: tape
PURPOSE: audio-discrimination of consonental and vocalic sounds
DIRECTIONS: which of the following words contain the given sound?
LEAD: /r/ gutterals - velars in the initial, secondary and final positions

1. (a) хочу
   (b) хто
   (c) ьогдан
   (d) ход м

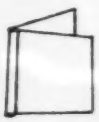
2. (a) гаразд
   (b) Максим
   (c) лекц я
   (d) добриденъ

LEAD: /Ш/ mixed consonants (velars, palatals, fricatives, dentals)

	/ж/	/щ/
1. (a) церква	2. (a) також	3. (a) душа
(b) читання	(b) зараз	(b) дуже
(c) чопобачення	(c) школа	(c) дуще
(d) допобачення	(d) разом	(d) дшино

NOTE: Knowledge of vocabulary at this time is unimportant
SKILL: listening and speaking
STIMULUS: visual model
PURPOSE: reinforcement of consonant (mimicry and memorization)

DIRECTIONS: student identifies object or action
LEAD: /r/

книга 

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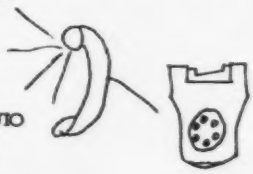
галлю 

SKILL: listening and speaking
STIMULUS: song (model or tape)
PURPOSE: strengthen pronunciation of consonants
(a) gutterals /Г/ /Х/
(b) gutterals /Г/
palatilizations/Т ь/
dipthongs /ай/ /ая/ /ой/

(a) у горах карпатах, ой там би я жив
з гори на долину все бим ся дивию
там птички співають злегенька,
все уха, ха, ха, ха
А голос сопілки там чути що днюю

(b) Ои хто, хто Миколая любить
Ои хто, хто Миколая служить
тому святий Миколай всяким помигай.

SKILL: listening
STIMULUS: tape
PURPOSE: audo-discrimination of intonational contours
DIRECTIONS: Which of the following statements are spoken as questions?

LEAD: Куди ти йдеш ?

a. Ти вже граєш у теніс.
b. Ти вже граєш у теніс?
c. Ти вже граєш у теніс!
d. Ти вже граєш у теніс...